

Winter recreation and you, winter fun in your backyard

by Nicole Johnson

“Are you open on the weekends?” is a common question we hear this time of year. Many people are amazed to discover that business continues as usual at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge during the winter. This is also true for our community outreach and education programs.

We always have something going on and this February will be no exception. To beat the winter blues, the refuge is hosting the 4th annual Winter Family Fun Day on Saturday, February 5th. This event encourages people to discover, explore, and appreciate the thrilling world outside even though it’s not the long, sunny days of summer.

Family activities will take place from 10:00 am to noon at the Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna on Ski Hill Road. This year, there will be indoor winter crafts, outdoor games, and snowshoe activities. Also, the Andrew Berg historical cabin will be open for people to learn more about Berg’s life and what it was like to homestead in Alaska. The guided snowshoe activities will be offered at 11:00 am and require pre-registration. The snowshoe activity is available to youth ages 9 and older with their parents. The Refuge will provide snowshoes. All activities are provided free of charge. Rather than spending another Saturday at home, come join the fun and don’t forget your warm, winter clothes and boots!

We don’t stop there. This time of year, many teachers and students crave a break from the confines of their classrooms. If you have a 4th–6th grade student in a central Kenai Peninsula school, they may be scheduled to come to the refuge on a winter field trip to the refuge. On their field trips, students will participate in outdoor activities and a snowshoe walk. The two

programs offered are “Wildlife in Winter” (4th and 5th grades) and “Winter Ecology” (6th grade). “Wildlife in Winter” focuses on how Alaskan wildlife adapts and survives winter and “Winter Ecology” focuses on environmental and human impacts on wildlife survival in winter. Last year we had 16 classes and a total of 795 students participate in these programs. We expect to see the same number, if not more students. The environmental education program is currently accepting registration for school groups.

If you haven’t found something that sounds right for you, we aren’t done yet! Have you wanted to learn about snowshoeing? If you are curious, please contact the refuge to sign up for a free adult snowshoe clinic. If we receive enough interest, the clinic will be scheduled for Saturday, March 5th. Space will be limited to 20 participants and snowshoes will be provided.

Last but not least, other winter opportunities include visiting the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center on the weekends for a variety of free films. Whether it is cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, or a simple walk, the trails surrounding the Visitor Center can provide hours of recreational opportunities.

To register for the guided snowshoe walk, schedule a winter field trip, express interest in a snowshoe clinic, or to learn about current trail conditions call 262-7021 for more information. And to answer the common question, “Are you open on the weekends?” the answer is a resounding “yes”. There are lots of fun, winter opportunities for you right here in town.

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